

Divide: 'There's such a culture clash, I don't think it can be explained'

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Oct. 1 shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg. Nine people dead, plus the gunman. Nine wounded.

One issue, two sides

From urban areas, primarily, come the demands for greater gun control. From rural areas, primarily, comes the answer: Leave us alone.

How to cross that divide?

"There's such a culture clash. I don't think it can be explained," said Goit, who opened Eastern Oregon Tactical in Hermiston four years ago. "The opposite culture baffles me."

Wes Hare says it's a really tough question.

Hare is city manager of Albany, in the Willamette Valley. He started in Ashland, went to high school in Bend, and lived in Eugene, Oakridge and La Grande before Albany. He's spent plenty of time in Portland and Salem. He guesses the urban-rural divide in Oregon isn't much different than a lot of other states.

"I think typically the notion is, and I'm sure it's true, in predominantly rural places people are more concerned about gun rights, more interested in them and more concerned about intrusion" on those rights, Hare said.

Part of that attitude comes from heritage. Many rural Westerners grew up handling guns at relatively young ages. Tap a current or former country boy of a certain age and he'll tell you of the single-shot .22 rifle leaning against the wall in the closet. Squirrels beware.

"When I was a kid," Hare said, "you could go out in the country and shoot a gun, and it wouldn't cause much of a stir — in part because there weren't as many people around."

"If you live on a ranch, who cares if you shoot a gun?" Hare said. "You won't hit anything."

Hare had a .22 for plinking and a Winchester .308 for hunting deer. Gun ownership was part of the culture.

"That doesn't mean there weren't problems with guns," he said. An eighth-grade classmate was accidentally shot and killed

by his father while hunting. A kid living nearby was shot by his brother but survived. A friend's father committed suicide with a gun. An elderly neighbor shot his wife, then killed himself.

"Guns were very much part of the culture, but so were gun deaths," Hare said.

Senior Trooper Kreg Coggins, who works from the Oregon State Police outpost in Enterprise, in Oregon's northeast corner, said he interacts with armed, legal hunters 12 months of the year.

"I'm somewhat desensitized to people who have guns," he said. "It's kind of odd for them not to have guns."

Means of protection

In the rural West, help from sheriff's deputies or state troopers may be spread thin and miles distant.

Some residents, it's fair to say, own guns and keep them handy out of a belief that they may need to protect themselves, their families and their livestock, equipment, crops or other valuables.

Two-legged troublemakers are a worry, but many rural Westerners also share the landscape with coyotes, cougars, wolves or bears.

Eastern Idaho rancher Brian Mays, who leases a 300-acre private pasture southeast of Henry's Lake, estimates grizzlies have killed 14 of his cows in the past four years — four this season. He recently rounded up some heavily armed compatriots to help him scour the brush for cattle, or bears.

"They're not the warm fuzzy creatures everybody seems to think they are," Mays said. "If urban people could see how vicious they are with their prey when they kill them, it might wake them up."

Urban reality

It's different in cities.

Some urban areas put up with the occasional cougar scare or coyotes carrying off cats, but most city wildlife encounters in-

volve raccoons or possums, not wolves or grizzlies.

Gang shootouts are a danger in some city neighborhoods. The presence of unruly street kids and unkempt homeless people, some of them clearly mentally ill, may add to urban unease about weapons or an interest in possessing them.

The Oregonian reported in 2013 that 1 in 16 Oregonians held a concealed handgun license, or CHL. At one point in the early 2000s in Gresham, a Portland suburb, two members of the City Council and its city manager held CHLs.

Open carry is legal in Portland, but guns must be unloaded unless the carrier has a concealed handgun license, Portland Police Bureau spokesman Sgt. Pete Simpson said.

Portland police have responded to 911 calls involving people who were openly carrying firearms, Simpson said. Statistics on the number of such calls are not readily available, but Simpson said officers respond based on information they receive. Open-carry advocates such as Goit, the Hermiston gun shop owner, might not be received calmly in cities.

"It is problematic in an urban environment," Simpson said, "as it's not something people are used to seeing and arguably could put the carrier at risk from another carrier who may perceive a threat."

Armed with statistics

A report released in August by the Pew Research Center, based in Washington, D.C., documented the urban-rural differences. Of people living in urban areas, 60 percent believe it's more important to control gun ownership and 38 percent believe gun rights should take priority. The results are reversed in rural areas, with 63 percent saying gun rights are more important. Suburban residents were evenly divided on the question.

The question of whether to

ban the sale of military-style assault weapons also illustrates the divide. Sixty-two percent of urban residents favor a ban, while agreement drops to 56 percent of suburban residents and 48 percent of rural residents, according to the Pew report.

But a greater percentage of rural and suburban residents — 80 percent and 81 percent, respectively, compared to 76 percent of urban residents — believe mentally ill people should be banned from having guns.

Interestingly, the U.S. firearm homicide rate has been steadily dropping since 1993, according to the Pew study. Homicides involving firearms accounted for seven deaths per 100,000 people in 1993, but dropped to 3.6 per 100,000 people by 2010. Suicides account for 60 percent of firearm deaths nationally, and about 75 percent in Oregon, according to the group Ceasefire Oregon.

The group, based in Portland, describes itself as opposing gun violence and advocating for reasonable gun control laws. Among other things, Ceasefire Oregon hosts voluntary gun turn-in events that, since 1994, have resulted in more than 7,800 weapons being turned in and destroyed.

Common ground

Executive Director Penny Okamoto said the urban-rural gun divide is not as deep as groups such as the National Rifle Association would have people believe.

The vast majority of gun owners support background checks, safe storage of weapons and suicide prevention programs, Okamoto said.

Ceasefire Oregon also advocates a ban on high-capacity magazines and a limit of one gun purchase a month to prevent trafficking, she said.

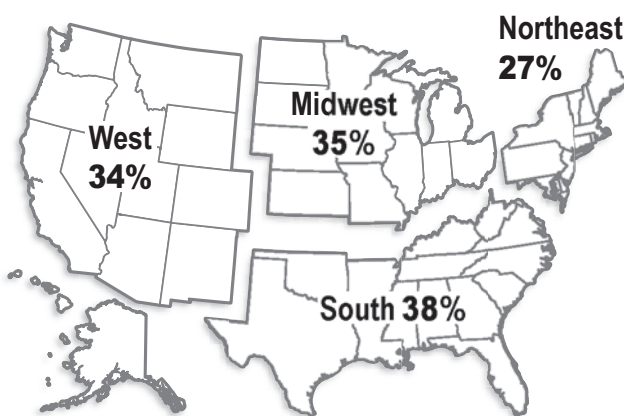
"We have a lot of common ground," Okamoto said. "People are not opposed to responsible gun ownership, and that's the vast majority of gun owners."

"There are a lot of things we can do to reduce gun violence and stay well within the Second Amendment," she said.

"I tell people gun violence is

Gun ownership by region*

Percent of all households with a gun in the home.



Percent in each group who say they have a gun, pistol or rifle in their home:

Gender



Age



Environment



Party



Ideology



*Based on a national survey of 3,243 adults with an overall sampling margin of error of plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.

Source: Pew Research Center, American Trends Panel, April 29-May 27, 2014

Capital Press graphic

like cancer," she said. "There are a lot of different kinds of cancer, and a lot of different kinds of gun violence.

"You can't cure all cancer with one pill, and you can't kill gun violence with one law or one education program."

Ryan Taggart, Nurse
Critical Care Unit
9 years at CMH

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Joe Cortright
November 5

Joe Cortright is president and principal economist of Impresa Consulting of Portland. He is chair of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors. Also he is director of a new think tank called City Observer, funded by the John S. Knight Foundation.

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